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THE PHILOSOPHY OF HERBERT SPENCER *

In the death of Herbert Spencer on December 8th, 1903, there passed from the stage of the world's activity one of the greatest synthetic thinkers which the Anglo-Saxon race has produced. We in America may rightfully claim an especial interest in Mr. Spencer, inasmuch as his writings won an earlier recognition and acceptance among us than was the case in the mother country. Those liberal principles which Spencer held both in politics and in religion probably furnished a reason why there should be an especial bond of sympathy between him and scientific thinkers on this side of the Atlantic. Be that as it may, Herbert Spencer belongs not to England alone, but to the English-speaking race the world over. Not only so, but his message has gone forth into all the world; his clear and vigorous thought, his direct and incisive speech have left their impress upon the whole scientific thought of our time. But as a thinker Mr. Spencer primarily belongs to the school of British empirical philosophy; to the sober, practical, utilitarian school which was inaugurated by Bacon, and continued by Locke, Bentham, and John Stuart Mill. Mill was, in fact, Spencer's immediate precursor in the field of inductive science; and Spencer is seen in his true light when he is recognized as the continuator of Mill.

Mr. Spencer never seems to have felt the influence of the idealistic type of thought, even as held and promulgated in Great Britain; while of foreign philosophy, particularly of the modern idealistic philosophy of Germany, he knew practically nothing, and in all likelihood cared even less. It is true

* *The Autobiography of Herbert Spencer*. Two Volumes. New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1904.

Synthetic Philosophy, by Herbert Spencer. New York, D. Appleton and Co. *Naturalism and Agnosticism*, being the Gifford Lectures for 1896-1898, by James Ward, LL.D., Professor of Mental Philosophy and Logic in Cambridge University, England. Macmillan, New York, 1899.

Spencer and Spencerism, by Hector Macpherson, Chapman and Hall, London, 1900.

Comte, Mill and Spencer, by John Watson, LL.D., Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Queen's College, Kingston, Canada. Macmillan and Co. 1895.

that the "positive philosophy" of Auguste Comte had influenced him to a certain degree; no doubt as it had come to him through John Stuart Mill. But on the speculative side, as far as Mr. Spencer permitted himself to indulge in speculation at all, his chief debt is owed to Sir William Hamilton and Dean Mansel. Hamilton and Mansel were Christian agnostics. But they were Christian first and agnostic second; while Mr. Spencer was an agnostic first, and a Christian not at all. Spencer borrowed from Hamilton and Mansel the arguments by which they had supported their theory of philosophic nescience; but he did not take over that element of religious faith which had, in fact, been the profoundest element in their view of the universe. But Spencer's main interests were not religious and metaphysical, but scientific. He deliberately confined himself to the study of phenomena; to the facts and forces of the visible universe. And these forces he conceived of mainly as physical forces. Those chapters upon "The Unknowable" which stand at the beginning of Mr. Spencer's "First Principles" form in reality but an introduction to that part of his work in which he has put forth his full strength,—I mean, the discussion of the universal laws of phenomena; chiefest among which, and comprehending all the rest is that supreme generalization of Evolution, which it is perhaps Mr. Spencer's proudest distinction to have formulated.

When we turn to Mr. Spencer's treatment of the great universal principles and laws which lie at the basis and form the framework of all the special sciences, we cannot fail to be impressed not only by his penetrative insight and comprehensive grasp, but also by his ability to reduce a multitude of individual facts and details to the ordered unity of a system. Reverence for facts, the passion for reality, in his case, as always, have their outcome not only in evident sincerity, but also in self-restraint, as well as in moderation of statement. But Mr. Spencer uniformly and consistently falls short of treating those problems of thought which are deepest and highest. It is in the fields of the visible and tangible rather than of the invisible and spiritual that he finds his congenial home. Intellectually, Mr. Spencer exemplifies that discursive faculty of the mind which operates by de-

duction and induction, rather than that highest faculty which Aristotle denominated the "active reason;" the faculty namely, which contemplates intellectual truth in its ultimate principles. The writer of a review article which was published in the *New York Tribune*, and dated London, Dec. 8th, 1903, makes the statement (which, while no doubt exaggerated, nevertheless points towards a truth) that "in spite of (Spencer's) encyclopaedic grasp of details, he was less capable of abstract thought than any man of high intellectual powers in ancient or modern times." The reviewer proceeds to illustrate what he means by adverting to Mr. Spencer's use of the words "conception" and "conceive" as connoting intellectual activities or operations. The term "conception" which is used by logicians and metaphysicians to denote the abstract definition,—that which Aristotle calls the "formal cause" or "essence" of things, in the sense of "being, combined with qualities," Mr. Spencer uses throughout in the meaning of "mental image" or "thought picture." In other words, Mr. Spencer is dealing with *aesthemata* and *phantasmata*, rather than with *noemata*; that is to say, with sense perceptions and with mental and physical phenomena, rather than with abstract intellectual concepts. In other words, he is dealing, as, in fact, he professes to deal, not with the ideal constructions of thought, but with material and tangible realities. If this fact constitutes, as no doubt it does, a limitation upon Mr. Spencer's thinking, at the same time it must be acknowledged that just here is found the secret of his strength as a scientist and a positive philosopher. Mr. Spencer is at home in the realm of mechanics and physics, of chemistry and of biology. No doubt, he is also at home in the realms of psychology and of sociology; but even in these latter departments of knowledge and reality he never gets far away from that which is material and tangible and perceptible by the senses. He prefers to treat of psychology and of sociology on the basis of physical laws. And although it does not fall within our present purpose to discuss Mr. Spencer's system of Ethics, yet it may be remarked that in this field he shows a distinct trend in the direction of utilitarianism, even though he does criticise the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill.

Our chief concern in this paper, however, is with Mr. Spencer's utterance in regard to certain of the fundamental problems of human thought; for he has, as a matter of fact, expressed himself upon these problems, even though not professedly from the point of view of the metaphysician. Mr. Spencer's general intellectual and philosophical position is clearly and fully set forth, as is well known, in his "First Principles." And here one is at the outset confronted by the oft-repeated charge brought against Mr. Spencer that he is a materialist. Although this accusation, strictly speaking, cannot be maintained, at the same time it can hardly be questioned that many passages of Mr. Spencer's writings do evince a tendency to interpret mental and spiritual phenomena by means of physical forces. Properly speaking, however, Mr. Spencer's ultimate principle is not Matter, any more than it is conscious Intelligence. If Mr. Spencer has a philosophy at all, that is to say, in the metaphysical sense, one ought to speak of that philosophy as a system of Dynamism; since, in Mr. Spencer's view, it is Force which is the "ultimate of ultimates." It must be acknowledged, however, that Force is conceived by Mr. Spencer mainly as physical force, and for this reason it can hardly be denied that much of his thought does inevitably show a materialistic trend. But Mr. Spencer, true to the limitations which he has set himself in his task, does not undertake to go into any metaphysical explanation of the nature either of force or of matter.

As has already been said, his system gives no place to, as it has no room for, abstract or metaphysical conceptions, as such. This point cannot be illustrated better than by reference to what Spencer has to say in regard to Matter in the chapter which deals with "The Persistence of Force," ("First Principles," §60): "Power of resisting that which we know as our own muscular strain is an ultimate element in our idea of body, as distinct from space." In a foot-note Mr. Spencer explains his meaning more fully. "I am," he says, "as in the last chapter, at issue with some of my scientific friends. They do not admit that the conception of force is involved in the conception of a unit of matter. *From the psychological point of view, however,*" (the term "psychological" as used in this connection is significant, and we have

accordingly italicised the phrase in which it occurs), "from the psychological point of view, Matter, in all its properties is the unknown cause of the sensations it produces in us; of which the one which remains when all others are absent, is resistance to our efforts,—a resistance we are obliged to symbolize as the equivalent of the muscular force it opposes. In imaging a unit of matter, we may not ignore this symbol, by which alone a unit of matter can be figured in thought as an existence. It is not allowable to speak as though there remained a conception of an existence when that conception has been eviscerated,—deprived of the element of thought by which it is distinguished from empty space. Divest the conceived unit of matter of the objective correlate to our subjective sense of effort, and the entire fabric of physical conceptions disappears."

Mr. Spencer's use of the terms "to imagine," "to think," "to conceive" as perfectly synonymous expressions will be sufficiently evident from this passage; which at the same time will serve to set forth in clear language his view of *force* as the ultimate Fact, and the real principle of Matter. But in our experience of the universe and of things therein we are brought in contact not only with Force, but with forces; not alone with energy in general, but with such specific energies as Gravity, Chemical Attraction, Organic or Vital Energy, (i. e. the power which expresses itself in the building up of physiological structures) and, finally, with the forces of conscious Will and self-directed Effort. What, now, will Mr. Spencer do with these various forces? Is the ultimate fact in regard to them their specific *distinctness*, or their generic *unity*? Spencer's answer to this question is expressed in no uncertain terms; it is, in fact, the common property of the scientific world; it is known and read of all men. What Charles Darwin did in respect to the several species of plant and animal life,—i. e. reduce them to an original unity, through tracing the process of their development,—that Spencer has done for the energies and laws which are operative throughout all nature; he has reduced them to a unity through the enunciation of the laws of the Transformation and Equivalence of Forces. All empirical forces, whether of Heat, of Light, of Electricity, or what not, are but particular expressions of the one

universal Energy. It is here that Spencer advances beyond John Stuart Mill.

To quote from an ardent disciple of Mr. Spencer:¹ "So long as the purely mechanical conception of the Universe obtained sway over the minds of philosophers, there was no getting beyond Positivism, with its theory that nothing can be known beyond co-existences and sequences. Mill's intellectual helplessness before the problem, his belief that there was no inherent necessity at the heart of things,—instance his declaration that in other worlds two and two might make five,—had their origin in the unconscious hold which the old mechanical conception of the Universe had upon his mind. The demonstration, "of the essential and necessary unity of the Cosmos was only made possible when the dynamic was substituted for the old mechanical point of view." "According to Mill," says Macpherson again,² "knowledge resolves itself into a recognition of particulars. . . . Mill, like Comte, considered that scientific men were going beyond the inductions of experience when they endeavored to attribute to Nature any kind of inherent regularity and necessity. . . . With Mill, a scientific philosophy had done its work when it revealed the existence of a number of apparently permanent laws whose inter-relation was undiscoverable, and upon which the regularity of the Cosmos depended. . . . Spencer's contribution to a scientific conception of the Universe consisted in going beyond Hume, Comte and Mill, in the direction of including all generalizations under one generalization, and in supplementing the inductive method by the deductive; thereby demonstrating the necessary and organic unity of the Cosmos."

This is indeed the language of an ardent disciple in celebrating the achievements of his master. According to Macpherson, Herbert Spencer has gloriously succeeded in accomplishing the great aim of his Synthetic Philosophy,—the enunciation and demonstration of the Law of Evolution in its universal scope and application. Plurality is reduced to Unity, and, by being thus reduced, is explained. Scientific and philosophical Monism is

¹ Hector Macpherson, in "Spencer and Spencerism" p. 69.

² Ibid., p. 27.

the answer to the riddle of the Universe. "Force is the ultimate of ultimates."³ The history of the universe is the history of the process by which this Force has unfolded itself through various modifications, and has progressively realized itself under an infinite variety of forms.

According to Macpherson, (p. 67), "Spencer repudiates as earnestly as his detractors the view that force, which on the mechanical side is the final word of the scientific conception of the world—is the final word of the philosophic conception. To the philosophical scientist force is but a symbol; in his view atoms and energies have only a relative value. Indeed, so impressed is Mr. Spencer with the inadequacy of the Materialist theory that in his *First Principles* and his *Psychology*, he says that it is more rational to conceive the ultimate principle of existence in terms of Mind than of Matter. But what the actual nature of the one reality is, Mr. Spencer does not undertake to say. . . ."

It is, however, very difficult to bring into harmony with these statements of Mr. Macpherson, Spencer's own language in his recently-published *Autobiography* (Vol. II, p. 15); "When writing the '*Principles of Psychology*' . . .," says Mr. Spencer, "and proposing . . . to interpret nervous phenomena as resulting from discharges along lines of least resistance, *my tendency to seek for ultimate physical principles as keys to complex phenomena*" (the italics are ours), "had shown itself. Apt thus to look at things, and prepared therefore to be especially receptive of such truths as that the various kinds of force are but different forms of one force, and that this one force can in no case be either increased or decreased, but only transformed; it is manifest that I was ready to have the several conceptions above described, still further unified by affiliation on these ultimate physical principles. There naturally arose the perception that the instability of the homogeneous and the multiplication of effects, must be derivative laws; and that the laws from which they are derived must be those ultimate laws of force similarly traceable throughout all orders of existences."

The above quotation sets before us in a clear light Mr. Spencer's characteristic position as to the applicability of the laws of

³"*First Principles*," p. 151.

physical force to the explanation of the phenomena of mind and consciousness. A strong criticism of this position of Spencer is that made by Professor John Watson, of Queen's College, at Kingston, Canada, (in his "Comte, Mill and Spencer," p. 193): "To speak of feelings in terms of nerve-movements is virtually to abolish the distinction between the feelings and the nerve-movement. Now, a feeling as it exists for consciousness is always a particular phase of reality as related by thought to other phases of reality. Apart from consciousness, the feeling has no existence as a known object; *as* a known object, it implies the universalizing activity of the one identical subject. But, if prior to the consciousness of the feeling there is no known feeling, to speak of a nerve-movement as if it could explain feeling is to assume that a peculiar form of reality can be explained without any reference to that without which it could not exist at all. Consciousness cannot be expressed in terms of motion, because, without supposing consciousness to be distinct from motion, there could be no consciousness at all."

So far Dr. Watson. I think we may say that Mr. Spencer's philosophy of the reciprocal relations existing between Mind on the one hand and Matter on the other, is by no means clear or consistent with itself. A good deal of his language appears to bear in the direction of tracing back all existence to the material and the mechanical as its origin and explanation; while in other passages, seeming to shrink from such a conclusion, he speaks of the "ultimate reality" as being "inscrutable;" and as being strictly interpretable neither in terms of Matter nor yet in terms of Consciousness.

A very striking illustration of Mr. Spencer's tendency to explain our conscious mental experiences by means of physical analogies and in terms of physico-mathematical laws is his attempted application of the atomic theory to Psychology. Mr. Spencer is speaking in this connection of the parallelism between the facts of nervous disturbance and the facts of mental action. His position is thus summed up by Prof. Watson (*op. cit.* p. 153); "But the parallelism is even closer. We are apt to suppose that the individual sensations and emotions we experience are absolutely simple. But they are not really so. A musical sound,

for example, is supposed to be a simple feeling. If equal blows or taps are made one after the other at a rate not exceeding some sixteen per second, the effect of each is perceived as a separate noise; but when the rapidity with which the blows follow one another exceeds this, the noises are no longer identified in separate states of consciousness, and there arises a continuous state of consciousness called a tone. Thus an apparently simple feeling is composed of various feelings. Now we must suppose, in the same way, that all kinds of feelings are really complex, though apparently simple. Nay, must we not suppose that *all* feelings are made up of elements that in the last analysis are absolutely identical in their nature? To this primordial element of consciousness a nervous shock of no appreciable duration may be supposed to correspond."

Mr. Spencer's own words⁴ bring out his meaning even more clearly and forcibly: "It is possible, then, may we not even say probable that something of the same order as that which we call a nervous shock is the ultimate unit of consciousness; and that all the unlikenesses among our feelings result from unlike modes of integration of this ultimate unit."

This attempt on the part of Mr. Spencer to reduce our mental experiences to what may be described as ultimate psychological units or atoms, or, to quote his own phrase, "units of consciousness," we are inclined to regard as having been pretty effectually disposed of by Professor Royce of Harvard in his recently-published volume on Psychology.⁵ "Consciousness," says Professor Royce tersely, "is not a shower of shot (p. 84). . . . It does not come to us as consisting of these elementary states" (p. 108). . . . Again, as Professor Royce continues, "A state of consciousness exists when somebody is conscious of that state. When nobody is conscious of that state, it does not exist. . . . The multiplicity that we might observe, and do not observe, belongs to a possible mental state which at the moment of our failure to observe, we do not possess. It now seems to us therefore wrong," concludes Professor Royce, "to say that a mental state consists at any time of elements which we ourselves do not

⁴"Principles of Psychology." vol. i, p. 151.

⁵"Outlines of Psychology" by Josiah Royce, Ph.D., LL.D.,

distinguish in that state" (p. 109). If the present writer may be permitted to sum up the matter as it presents itself to his own mind,—the sum and substance of the matter is that in Psychology we must take our stand upon *consciousness*. In a very real sense, we cannot go back of its data. If this be so, then Mr. Spencer's theory as to "units of consciousness" is utterly without meaning to the *psychologist*.

Now let us turn to Mr. Spencer's philosophy of the evolutionary process. This may fairly be said to be the back-bone of his entire system; upon this his reputation as a thinker will very largely stand or fall. One of the most serious criticisms of Herbert Spencer's evolutionary philosophy is that of Dr. James Ward, Professor of Mental Philosophy and Logic in Cambridge University, England. In his Gifford Lectures for 1896-98, on "Naturalism and Agnosticism," Dr. Ward, *inter alia* makes the point that Mr. Spencer's method of procedure in arguing for his evolutionary hypothesis is based upon a confusion of abstraction with analysis; that, under the cover of analyzing phenomena, Mr. Spencer "abstracts till he has no content left." "This abstract analytic procedure Hegel has quaintly compared to the process of peeling off the coats of an onion; now, in what Mr. Spencer calls ultimate analysis, all the coats are gone. If we are now to brush all these aside, it does not greatly matter whether we call what is left "non-being" or "being apart from all appearances." It is a question of taste; some prefer one, some the other. The way back to rational synthesis is alike impossible from either. The feats by which Mr. Spencer seems to accomplish it we have admired already. From the persistence of existence to the conservation of energy, and from the conservation of energy to the entire body of mechanical principles,—two easy steps for Mr. Spencer,—and he is in line with the mechanical theory. Having thus conjured himself back from a height of abstraction, avowedly devoid of all definite content, to definite content admitting of analysis, we are not surprised to find Mr. Spencer skillful enough to make a show of building up the whole fabric and essential history of life and mind and society in terms of that content, i. e. in terms of Matter, Motion and Force. Having advanced from the indefinite residuum as far as these three

coats of his onion and their laws, it seems no longer an impossible feat to conjure all the rest out of these. "But," Dr. Ward goes on to say, "I contend that it is only conjuring. The new elements are adroitly taken up as the synthesis advances, although they seem to have been swept from the board before the performance commenced. The process is not legitimate because they are not avowed as parts of the ultimate analysis; because, in fact, this supposed analysis is incomplete, is not analysis but abstraction, on the way to which these elements were left entirely aside."⁶

Dr. Ward makes use of the following illustration to show how Mr. Spencer advances from the bare and beggarly elements (if I may venture so to call them, with all due deference to the natural scientists), from the elements of Matter, Motion and Force to the highest and most concrete manifestations of Life and Mind and Purpose. Perhaps I cannot do better than give Dr. Ward's illustration in his own words, as it could not well be expressed in terser or more vigorous language: "Take," says he, "a shelf of miscellaneous books in the English language,—books on mathematics, chemistry, physiology, history, art, literature, or what you will,—and imagine a private student setting to work to improve his mind, as we say, by means of them. It will not be indifferent in what order he reads; to understand the physiology he will often find himself thrown back on the chemistry; to understand the chemistry he must often consult the mathematics; the art and the literature will be full of allusions to the history. Above all, the whole will presuppose that the student himself is a person with sense, intelligence, feeling, conscience. Nevertheless, if we are not to be too severe on the synthetic philosophy, we would better leave the student as much as may be out of account.

"Now let us introduce a man of letters with a Spencerian sense of thoroughness. The first step, he will say, must be to analyze all this material; and only an *ultimate analysis* will suffice; we must not pause till we have reached the *imperceptible*. Specialists, he will continue, have already provided nomenclatures and terminologies, glossaries, indexes of persons and things,

⁶"Naturalism and Agnosticism," pp. 258, 259.

and the like. Passing beyond all this *un-unified* knowledge, the lexicographer provides us with *partially unified* knowledge, and covers the whole range of these books by an adequate dictionary of the English tongue. We get still nearer to that *ultimate knowledge* when we can exhibit the letters of the alphabet as the constituents of English as it is, was, and will be. But even these letters are made up of strokes of two kinds,—viz., straight strokes and curved strokes; and only when these are disintegrated into the primordial dots of which they must be compounded, and these dots duly dissipated, have we reached that *ultimate* and *imperceptible* state where *rational synthesis* must begin. Evolution then arises as this *dissipation* gives place to *concentration*, and with increased *concentration* comes increased *differentiation*; and so we advance from dots to strokes, from strokes to letters of various forms, from these to syllables ‘with a subsequent advance to dissyllables and polysyllables, and to involved combinations of words’—the *heterogeneity* steadily increasing in geometrical progression. As these *aggregates* of letters grow in *complexity* and *definiteness* more wide-reaching *interdependencies* become manifest; in short, what is called grammar and sense arise.

“But not only do we find in these the same processes of *integration*, *differentiation*, and *segregation* already exemplified; they are also themselves objectively presented and more or less permanently registered in literal form. Then, when at length the change which evolution presents is complete, and *equilibration* is reached, we have, in what we know as stereotype, that perfection, harmony, and complete *congruity* which the stereotyped editions of the synthetic philosophy so admirably illustrate. To be sure, this interpretation of all literary phenomena in terms of *integrated* black and *diffused* white is nothing more than the reduction of *complex phenomena* to their simplest forms; and as that philosophy shows, “when the equation has been brought to its lowest terms the symbols remain symbols still.”⁷ No doubt, “most persons,” as the author of that philosophy remarks, “have acquired repugnance to such modes of interpretation.” But, as he further truly says, “whoever remembers that the forms of existence [in

⁷“First Principles,” p. 558.

his case Matter and Motion, in ours print and paper] which the illiterate speak of with so much scorn are shown to be the more marvellous in their attributes the more they are investigated . . . will see that the course proposed does not imply the degradation of the so-called higher, but an elevation of the so-called lower.”⁸ From the infant's primer with its strokes and pot-hooks up to the pages of Newton and Spencer, we discern the same *evolving aggregate* not progressively *integrating* simply, but simultaneously undergoing various *secondary redistributions*; the *structural complexities* thus emerging being ever accompanied by the *functional complexities* known as grammatical, logical, literary, scientific, and so forth. Given the *indestructibility* of ink and the *persistence* of paper, together with the various *derivative laws* that are their corollaries and consequences, and it can be shown—adapting the words of our great evolutionist—not only how the grammatical elements exhibit the traits they do, but how books are evolved, thoughts generated, and civilizations achieved. But deny our fundamental datum, or as Mr. Spencer says: “let idealism be true, and evolution is a dream.”⁹

Caustic and severe as is Prof. Ward's criticism, the present writer is inclined to believe that its substantial justice will become increasingly apparent as time goes on. It is a safe and sound principle that you cannot get out of a thing more than is already in it; you may label that thing Evolution, or what you will. And, moreover, if Evolution is a process, the process itself must be accounted for; that is, if we are to have not only an evolutionary science but also a science of Evolution. It has often been said, and it cannot be too often repeated, that if Evolution be true, there can be nothing in the higher stages of evolutionary process which was not, potentially at least, in the lower. And in the account which science is at this day able to give of this evolutionary process there are certain gaps which as yet can hardly be said to have been bridged over. Dr. Ward calls attention to the fact that two most important volumes of Mr. Spencer's philosophy were left unwritten—the volumes, to wit, which should have dealt with Inorganic Evolution, and with

⁸ Ibid., p. 556.

⁹ “Naturalism and Agnosticism,” pp. 249–251.

the origin of life. That is to say: in Mr. Spencer's system as he has left it to the world, there still yawns the great gap between the inorganic and the organic kingdoms. And when we come to the relations between the physical life and the conscious psychical and mental life, Mr. Spencer's explanations can hardly be said to be adequate or satisfactory.

To begin with, Mr. Spencer as a psychologist recognizes the dualism existing between Mind on the one hand, and Matter on the other hand. Subject and object are, in his words, "antithetically opposed divisions of the entire assemblage of things." The distinction of subject and object,—that is to say, the distinction between Matter on the one hand, and Consciousness on the other hand, means the consciousness of a difference transcending all other differences.¹⁰ Mr. Spencer holds that we can reduce the subject to units of feeling, and the object to units of force; but we cannot reduce units of feeling to units of force; this is, in his own words, "the distinction never to be transcended while consciousness lasts." But admitting, as Mr. Spencer does, this unresolvable distinction between Mind and Matter, he thereby necessarily surrenders any principle of absolute Monism; whether that Monism be construed in a materialistic or an idealistic sense; and thereby, as it appears to us, virtually surrenders the synthetic unity of his system. In other words, if such a line of demarcation be admitted as that which we have just seen Mr. Spencer to admit as existing between Consciousness on the one hand and material existence on the other, why may not the principle of differentiation have a still wider application? and in that case does not the attempt to explain all things by virtue of one ultimate, simple and abstract principle still more evidently break down?

Inasmuch as Mr. Spencer's doctrine of the Relativity of Knowledge does not differ essentially from that of other thinkers, it does not seem to call for an especial discussion in this place. We shall therefore pass on to consider, in conclusion, Mr. Spencer's doctrine concerning the *Absolute*, or that which he speaks of as the *Unknowable*; both in respect to the relation

¹⁰"Principles of Psychology," § 62.

in which this Unknowable stands to the world of phenomena, and also as the Unknowable may be considered in itself.

As we have already seen, Mr. Spencer holds that physical or mechanical force, like Matter, is but a symbol of the ultimate Reality.¹¹ "Knowledge proper is confined to the sphere of the phenomenal";¹² and "philosophy is restricted to the unification of knowledge,"¹³ i. e. of the knowledge of the phenomenal universe. Both Mind and Matter, as Mr. Spencer holds, are but symbols of some inscrutable Reality which lies back of them and of which they constitute, to use the language of Mr. Bradley, the "Appearance." How, then, we inquire, does the Absolute stand related to the phenomenal world, whether of Matter or of Mind? Mr. Spencer's answer to this question is that the Absolute is the Source of all power and energy,—the One supreme Cause of all things that are known, while it remains itself unknown and unknowable by us. It is the infinite and eternal Energy from which all things proceed.

Under this head two inquiries suggest themselves: the statement of which, and the attempt briefly to suggest an answer to them will form the conclusion of this paper. Our first question is this: "Is Mr. Spencer's account of the Absolute and of the relation of the Absolute to the phenomenal world self-consistent?" On page 176 of his "First Principles" Mr. Spencer postulates an Absolute Force as "the necessary correlate of the force we are conscious of." This Absolute Force is identified by Mr. Spencer with "*the Unconditioned*" of Sir William Hamilton; with that Unknowable which, in Mr. Spencer's language, is "the necessary correlative of the Knowable." But did not Mr. Spencer perceive his own inconsistency in using this language about the Absolute? For if he means by the Absolute that which the term is generally understood to mean,—i. e., the antithesis of the Relative; that which, in contrast with the Relative, does not stand in any necessary relation to anything but itself,—then how can one speak of this Absolute (i. e., the Unknowable) as "*the necessary correlative*" of the Knowable"? If this

¹¹ Macpherson, *ut supra*, p. 67.

¹² Note on p. 169 of "First Principles."

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Absolute Force, i. e., this "Ultimate" of Mr. Spencer is a "correlative" or a "correlate" of something else; still more, if it is the "*necessary*" correlate of that something else, is it not evident that by the fact of this necessary relation to something which is not itself, the Absolute ceases to be Absolute?

But it may be said in reply that Mr. Spencer is himself the first to admit these incongruities, which are, as he says, but the necessary outcome of the limitations of human thought; and that it is therefore not fair to tax him with inconsistency on this head. If Mr. Spencer is inconsistent with himself, he may plead that at least he is no worse than other thinkers; he may avail himself of the old argument "*tu quoque*." Forbearing, therefore, to press this point further, let us pass on to our second and closing question:—Is Mr. Spencer's doctrine of the Absolute as the Absolute is in itself—we do not say, *adequate*, (for who can adequately expound the Infinite and Supreme Reality?)—but, so far as it goes, or in the extent to which it goes, satisfying? "So far as it goes,"—in this phrase, as we conceive it, lies just the point at issue. For our contention is, that in the account which he has given of the Absolute, Mr. Spencer either goes too far, or he does not go far enough. He admits the Absolute to be *Power*, as we have seen. Not only so,—he also admits the Absolute to be not merely Power, but *Cause*. He is, however, unwilling to speak of the Absolute as a *Person*, on account, as it appears, of the limitations and apparent contradictions with which our thought is confronted when we endeavor to apply personal terms, or in fact, human conceptions of any kind, to the Absolute and Infinite Being. But are these difficulties, (the existence of which we, for our own part, by no means deny), confined to the category of *Personality*? Do they not also confront us in connection with the category of Unity, for example? While Mr. Spencer's construction of things in general is *unitary*, other thinkers, like Professor James, of Harvard, contend that philosophers must in future deal more seriously with the *pluralistic* hypothesis than they have been doing.¹⁴

Again, is not the conception of *Force*, whether as Absolute or relative, beset with metaphysical difficulties? Yet we have seen

¹⁴ "The Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 526.

Mr. Spencer freely attaching this conception to his idea of the Absolute. Once more,—are there no metaphysical difficulties bound up with the conception of Causality? Rather does not the slightest study of the history of human thought exhibit to our view the category of Causality as the very point where the battles of the metaphysicians have ever raged most fiercely? Yet we have seen Mr. Spencer conceding that the Absolute is a Cause. Why, then, should Mr. Spencer stop here, and decline to advance further? Why should he draw the line at Consciousness, and decline to construe the Absolute in terms of the Personal? Mr. Spencer, as we have seen, speaks of the Absolute as being also the Unknowable. He uses these two terms indifferently to describe the Ultimate Reality. But inasmuch as we have seen Mr. Spencer attaching metaphysical predicates to his Absolute, we are, I contend, justified in holding that, to that extent, Mr. Spencer's Unknowable has already ceased to be unknowable; to that extent it has, in effect, become knowable. Let us see, then, what is the extent of Mr. Spencer's admissions.

He admits, in the first place, that the Absolute *exists*; that there *is* such a thing as the Absolute. That is, Mr. Spencer construes the Absolute according to the metaphysical category of *Being*. In the next place, Mr. Spencer admits that the Absolute is *Power*,—and Infinite Power, at that. Mr. Spencer, therefore, feels himself justified in attributing to his Absolute not only *existence*, but *quality* or *potency*. But, as we have seen, he does not stop here. He goes further,—he speaks of the Absolute as Cause,—still another metaphysical category; and one about which, as we have observed, there has been endless controversy among philosophers. And now let us pause a moment, and ask ourselves what we mean by these metaphysical predicates which we have found Mr. Spencer using, and applying to the Absolute,—these predicates of *Being* and *Unity* and *Potency* and *Causality*. Whence do we derive the content which we put into these abstract terms, by which they become to us concrete and charged with meaning? Is it not from our own personal experience that we draw the content by which we fill out and vitalize these abstractions, so that they become real to our thought? I apprehend the meaning of the term "*existence*" be-

cause, and in so far as I myself exist. I understand what is meant by *power* for the very reason that I am conscious of myself as having exerted, or as exerting, or as being able to exert power by my will. I interpret to myself *power* in terms of volition, and not merely in terms of "muscular strain" or of the "objective correlate" of the latter.

Once more, I apprehend what is meant by *Causation* for the reason that I am conscious of myself as a cause. I am able through the intelligent and self-directed exercise of Will to produce certain intended and desired effects, and thereby to vindicate, both to myself and also to others my possession of this high prerogative of causality. In the words of Dr. Rashdall of Oxford: "It is this union of power with purpose which satisfies my idea of Causality. And such a union can be found only in a consciousness In our experience of volition, and in that experience alone, we are conscious of actually exercising Causality. There alone we find a content for the bare abstract notion of 'Cause'."¹⁵

There is one step more in this line of thought. It is not, of course, a mathematico-physical, or, in the narrower sense of the word, a "scientific" proof; it is not claimed for it that it is a strict, deductive chain of reasoning. Rather is it an argument by way of analogy. The line of thought, then, as I shall endeavor to sum it up in a few words, is as follows: In my consciousness of myself as exercising Causality there is involved the knowledge of myself as a person. For it is precisely in these facts of Consciousness which we have noted,—the facts, namely, of self-conscious being and self-directed activity,—that personality is involved. As we have just seen, it is only as I take my stand upon the basis of consciousness that I find myself in a position and at a point of view from which I can at all apprehend the meaning of Causality. And Causality, as so understood, involves and means, personality. If this be true, then is it unreasonable for me to add to those other predicates which Mr. Spencer attaches to the Absolute this predicate of Personality? Does not the scope and drift of the argument, indeed,

¹⁵ See his Essay on "The Ultimate Basis of Theism," in *Contentio Veritatis*, pp. 30, 31.

lead us to conclude, with Mr. Spencer's philosophical mentor, Dean Mansel, that "it is our duty to think of God as personal, while it is our duty to believe that He is Infinite?" The true outcome of our scientific and philosophical, as well as of our religious thinking is in *Theism*;—in the doctrine not only of the Absolute as the Ultimate Power and Cause, but in the Personal God, who is the Creator and Upholder of all things.

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